United Nations E/CN.6/2011/NGO/56

Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
6 December 2010
English
Original: Spanish

Commission on the Status of Women
Fifty-fifth session
22 February-4 March 2011
Item 3 (a) of the provisional agenda*
Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century": implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives

Statement submitted by Misión Mujer and Vida y Familia de Guadalajara, non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* E/CN.6/2011/1.

10-67790 (E) 201210 211210

Please recycle

Statement*

A new, more inclusive gender perspective through equitable access to education for youth

1. Education, a recognized human right, is essential to the development of human capital, and more specifically, to the future of young generations. Education, which is regarded as the key tool for motivating the genuine development of any country, must be universal, equitable and of high quality if it is to eradicate poverty and many of the other major problems we face, including violence, drugs, economic and social inequalities, and diseases such as AIDS.

2. Accordingly, the Beijing Platform for Action adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women recognizes the need for women to have full and equal access to education and training as one of the twelve areas for concern requiring urgent measures from Governments and the international community.

3. At its forty-first session held in 1997, the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women recommended the mainstreaming of a gender perspective into all policies and programmes of the education sector. Since then, important international efforts have been initiated to empower women in the area of education. These have yielded results in the majority of countries, particularly in terms of literacy rates, which now show a good gender balance. Recent research by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) found that on average, a greater proportion of women had obtained a university degree than men (46 per cent and 30 per cent, respectively) in OECD member countries.

4. Yet work remains to be done in terms of the education of young women, given the many reasons girls drop out of school. Gender inequality is most evident at the secondary school level, as a greater number of girls than boys leave school before completing their studies, particularly in rural or impoverished areas, for reasons including early marriage, adolescent pregnancy and the need to assist the family or learn practical skills in order to start working.

5. However, the issue of gender equity must not be approached from a single point of view, but rather from both the male and female perspective. It is therefore important to promote an integrated gender perspective in the home and at school, one which obviously includes issues that affect women, as well as the problems men face. Men also suffer as a result of the stereotypical acts that define "what it means to be a man", such as the glorification of violence, criminal behaviour, unsafe sexual practices, substance abuse and even suicide. The consequences of the masculinity crisis are acute and have a negative impact on women and therefore must be addressed.

6. The masculinity crisis has been exacerbated by the market decline, unemployment and the economic crisis. These have decreased the quality of life of families and undermined men's self-esteem and authority as the once-recognized head of the family. Consequently, men in some circumstances resort to committing violence against women and children as a means of showing that they can still have control over others, repeating the stereotype of what they conceive of as "being a real man". Such roots of gender-based violence must be acknowledged.

* Issued without formal editing.

7. Other issues are related to the lack of economic and leisure opportunities. For example, it is well known that both young men and young women engage in sexual relations as a way of gaining respect and social status in a group. In many contexts, the concept of masculinity is linked to risky sexual behaviours, leading to an increase in sexually transmitted diseases and early parenthood, with detrimental effects on the health of both men and women.

8. If gender is considered to be relational and both women's and men's issues have a significant impact on social development, then why does gender continue to be synonymous only with women? A gender perspective in education must be truly inclusive, as it is an issue that involves both sexes. While it is clear that women remain at a disadvantage in many areas, particularly in developing countries, interventions aimed at improving the situation of women will hardly be effective or sustainable if men are not involved, either through their cooperation or by making them responsible for their actions.

9. As long as the idea remains that men are the primary obstacle women face, instead of flawed education models and the cultural processes of inequity, it will be difficult to perceive any genuine development in future generations. However, it is important to recognize that in many cases, it is men themselves who refuse to adjust their preconceptions of what is masculine. These efforts should therefore receive the most intense focus in the education of young men.

10. Youth education on new, equal, equitable and complementary relationships between the sexes must go hand in hand with the promotion of positive images of male involvement in the home, responsible parenthood and the healthy sexual and reproductive development of adolescents. Effective educational programmes to involve young men consist of models that allow them to acknowledge pain, fear and suffering in a peaceful way, without committing violence against women or other men.

11. Young men have begun to view women differently in many social contexts, and today, many agree on the importance of their education and development. Given the view that both men and women reproduce gender norms, both sexes must be involved in the development and pursuit of new, healthier and more constructive paradigms, in order to build a more peaceful and equitable society. In conclusion, both public policy and the resources dedicated to education on gender equity must be aimed at fostering an inclusive perspective, based on the understanding that gender issues are important to both young women and young men and will be reflected in the way they relate to each other, their future families and society in general.